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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 PRAGUE 001349

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN CLOSED SOCIETIES: LESSONS  
LEARNED FROM CZECH EXPERIENCE

REF: A. PRAGUE 0058

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 0066

[1](#)C. PRAGUE 0068

[1](#)D. PRAGUE 0085

[1](#)E. PRAGUE 0097

[1](#)F. PRAGUE 0222

[1](#)G. PRAGUE 0504

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Michael Dodman  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. The Czechs are well-known for their spirited and effective promotion of democracy and human rights in closed societies, such as Belarus, Cuba, Burma, Iraq, and elsewhere. This cable highlights examples of Czech public diplomacy efforts in these countries. The goal of these Czech PD efforts is not to create a positive image of the Czech Republic; rather, the goal is to create the conditions necessary for a peaceful transition to democracy by exposing the general public to democratic ideals and objective information, and inspiring individuals to become future leaders of a democratic opposition (which can be nurtured by further Czech outreach). The most effective Czech public diplomacy projects promote this goal by: (1) promoting access to free media through radio, Internet, print media, and books, (2) training future leaders of democratic opposition groups, and/or (3) building relationships with promising young people. As described below, Czech public diplomacy runs the gamut from radio projects for Belarus, to public displays of support for Cuban political prisoners, to training for Iraqi journalists, to film projects for Burmese youth, and even a proposed tour by a North Korean children's choir. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Background. In the course of discussing Czech foreign policy generally, Poloff raised the question of best practices for public diplomacy in closed societies with Czech MFA Director of the Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS) Gabriela Dlouha, TRANS Deputy Director Marek Toman, Czech NGO People in Need (PIN) Human Rights Officer Megan King, and newly appointed Czech Ambassador on Energy Security (and former student dissident) Vaclav Bartuska. Their views and possible exemplars are provided below. Czech public diplomacy is a key part of the Czech effort to promote democracy and human rights in ten priority countries, including Belarus, Cuba, Burma, and Iraq (as previously reported in Refs A through E). End background.

[1](#)3. (U) The ultimate goal of these efforts is to create the conditions necessary for a peaceful transition by exposing the general public to democratic ideals and objective

information, and inspiring individuals to become future leaders of a democratic opposition (and then nurturing them). Projects typically support these goals by: (1) promoting access to free media, (2) training future leaders of democratic opposition groups, and (3) building relationships with promising young people.

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Increase Access to Information  
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¶4. (U) The Czech MFA and NGOs alike agree that access to independent media is an important tool in the effort to counter the power wielded by authoritarian regimes. Access to objective information helps citizens in a closed society realize the outside world supports rather than threatens them; that conditions are better outside the country than within; and that the regime has been deceitful or worse. Over time, access to new ideas can encourage like-minded people to coalesce into an organized opposition. Therefore, the MFA's Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS) funds programs that increase access to independent media by every means possible, including short-wave, FM and AM radio, Internet, satellite, films, books, and print media. Examples of such projects include:

-- (SBU) TRANS supports free press in Belarus by purchasing small space advertisements in independent newspapers, such as "Narondnaja Volja," an independent newspaper published in Russia and distributed in Belarus, and "Arche," an independent foreign affairs journal. The advertisements are non-political in nature ("Visit the Czech Republic!") and are therefore unobjectionable to the Lukashenko regime. The advantage of this approach is that it legally provides financial support for the newspapers.

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-- (C) The Czechs believe widespread access to the Internet is crucial for access to objective information. In Cuba, the Czechs have urged all European missions to install "Internet cafes" for Cubans, as the U.S. Interests Section has done. (Note: although EU member states have agreed in principle, obtaining the necessary hardware and Internet connections has proved difficult. End note.) In Belarus, listeners access RFE/RL and ERB radio broadcasts primarily via the Internet. (Note: some countries, including Belarus, block specific web sites or search terms, although to date, neither RFE nor ERB have been blocked. However, "instant messenger" communications cannot be blocked. End note.)

-- (C) In 2005, PIN published a book describing Czech "lessons learned" during their transition to democracy. PIN distributes the Spanish version to Cuban dissident groups on and off the island. (Note: the U.S. Interests Section in Havana has agreed to distribute the books. End note.) The book has also been published in Belarusian and English, and is being translated into Burmese. PIN hopes to translate the book into Arabic when funds become available.

-- (U) Czech NGO Democracy and Cultural Studies Center also published a book in Arabic describing the Czech democratic transition with funding from the International Republican Institute (IRI). The Center also brought young Iraqi leaders to the Czech Republic in 2004 to observe the running of a local election.

-- (U) European Radio Belarus (ERB), modeled on Radio Free Europe, transmits independent media into Belarus. TRANS plans to provide financial support for ERB operations through 2007 (in partnership with the USG and others). ERB content is prepared by Belarusian journalists in Belarus, in the Belarusian language, and rebroadcast from Poland into Belarus. The programming is "surrogate," meaning it provides content relating to internal events in Belarus, not just international news programming (like CNN or BBC).

15. (SBU) In addition to transmitting information into a country, Czechs also train independent journalists to work within countries like Cuba and Iraq.

-- (C) In the case of Cuba, PIN organized five seminars to take place in the Czech Republic in 2006 to provide training for approximately 60 independent Cuban journalists in 10 separate groups. The training focused on journalistic and photographic best practices. PIN also provided journalists with hardware, technology, and supplies (Ref B).

-- (U) In the case of Iraq, PIN is training aspiring journalists in Jordan. It has assured publication of their articles by paying them for every story published in the local Iraqi press. To date, local publications in Iraq have published hundreds of stories written by PIN-trained journalists. (Note: the Czech MFA and PIN hope to cooperate with the U.S. on projects for Iraq.) The Czechs have employed a rigorous screening process to avoid the problem of "training tourists" described below. For more information about this program and the screening process, see Ref E.

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Nurture the Democratic Opposition  
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16. (U) The hallmark of Czech democracy promotion is creating networks of trusted and trained democratic opposition leaders (Ref A). They do this by providing capacity training where possible, providing material aid and support, and by raising public awareness.

17. (SBU) TRANS funds capacity building programs to ensure that people in closed societies with leadership potential have the skills necessary to engineer a transition to democracy. The location of training for these trainees depends on whether they are able to travel outside their country. In the case of Belarus, where travel to Europe is relatively easy, trainees are often trained in the Czech Republic because it: (1) is safe and affordable, (2) can be done without monitoring by the regime, (3) allows Czech experts to provide the training, and (4) allows the trainees to experience first hand the benefits of the Czech post-Communist transition. When training in the Czech Republic is not feasible, Czech NGOs also provide in-country training in Eastern Europe, Cuba, and Jordan.

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18. (U) The following are examples of Czech capacity training.

-- (U) Czech projects in Belarus, Ukraine, and Georgia provide training on issues necessary to achieve and sustain a successful democratic transition (e.g., economics, self-governance, judicial reform, defense, social systems, police and military reform, restitution and privatization issues). Trainees are typically members of civil society (e.g., lawyers, teachers, scientists, engineers) or locally elected government officials (referred to by TRANS as "the alternative elite") (Ref C).

-- (C) In places where civic organizations largely do not exist, such as in Moldova/Transnistria, TRANS supports small grass roots efforts -- such as projects that support Latin script schools or farmers -- in order to build a tradition of community networking and civic activism.

-- (SBU) TRANS recently funded a project called "Talking to Power" to provide leadership and "transition" training for nine members of the Belarusian democratic opposition (hand-picked by Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich). The week-long simulation program, which took place in Prague in July 2006, was designed to help the Belarusians develop the strategic skills necessary to engineer a transition to democracy. (Note: the Embassy hosted

a reception in honor of the Belarusian delegates to show U.S. solidarity and support for Czech efforts to promote democracy in Belarus. Attendees included seven European Ambassadors, Czech government officials and MPs, and Czech NGOs working in Belarus. End note.)

-- (U) The training of Cuban and Iraqi journalists described above are also examples of capacity building.

¶9. (U) The downsides of capacity building training include:

-- (U) The risk that a participant is working for the regime. The Czechs rely heavily on selecting participants referred by trusted sources.

-- (U) The risk of creating "professional revolutionaries" and "training tourists." These are people motivated not by a desire to become an advocate for democracy, but rather by the (understandable) desire to leave their home country to escape persecution or violence, receive a salary, training and/or a college education, and stay in a nice hotel.

-- (U) People who leave their country for training may be monitored, harassed, or arrested by the regime upon their return.

¶10. (U) Czechs nurture the opposition by providing material support (financial, educational, or medical) for themselves and their families, especially in Cuba and Belarus (Refs A, B, C).

¶11. (U) Support may take the form of private or public encouragement. Based on their own experience, Czechs appreciate the value of such solidarity, which they believe strengthens the confidence and effectiveness of democratic opposition groups. Public statements, including UN resolutions, educate the outside world about human rights violations taking place within the country, and may lead to increased international pressure on the regime. A good example of Czech public solidarity includes the jail cell erected by PIN each year in Prague to mark the anniversary of the date in 2003 that Castro jailed 75 political prisoners. Famous Czechs (politicians, diplomats, actors, and sports figures) wear striped prison uniforms and sit in the jail cell to raise awareness about the ongoing plight of these prisoners. (In a related event in 2006, the U.S. Ambassador marched with then-Czech FM Cyril Svoboda to honor the peaceful resistance of the Damas de Blanco, the wives and mothers of these prisoners.)

¶12. (U) Czech NGOs use conferences to raise international public awareness about human rights violations. For example:

-- (U) the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC), founded by former Czech President Vaclav Havel, publicizes human rights abuses in Cuba through conferences. (One will take place in Berlin in Spring 2007.) For more information about ICDC publicity efforts, see Ref B.

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-- (U) Forum 2000, also founded by President Havel, is an international conference that takes place each year in Prague to allow leaders and intellectuals from around the world discuss tough human rights issues.

-- (U) The Czech MFA hosted the Council in Europe Conference in February 2006 to build consensus within the EU on Belarus (Ref F). It is worth noting that TRANS Deputy Director Toman said such large events, at least from his point of view, do not provide sufficient value to justify the expense. (Note: On the other hand, the conference arguably raised public awareness about events taking place in Belarus and provided solidarity for members of the Belarusian united democratic opposition, who were able to attend and speak publicly. End note.)

¶13. (SBU) Although large public conferences can generate public awareness, small private conferences can be used to build consensus among key players and develop policy. For example, the MFA hosted a private conference on Cuba in Spring 2006 that proved to be a catalyst for negotiating a new common position on Cuba within the EU (Ref G). The conference featured one day of meetings with NGOs actively working in Cuba, followed by one day of meetings with MFA officials from interested EU member states (including Spain). The MFA deemed the model so successful that they used it again recently to help them develop a new strategy for building civil society in Moldova/Transnistria.

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Friendship and Support for Young People  
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¶14. (C) The Czechs with whom we spoke place a premium on building relationships with promising youth in closed societies; they believe young people make better partners for change. This view may be based on the fact that Czech student dissidents were instrumental in creating the conditions that hastened the fall of Communism in 1989. In addition, the young tend to be more optimistic, more willing to take risks, and less likely to be affiliated with the regime. As described below, the Czechs reach out to the young in closed societies in innovative ways.

¶15. (C) For example, TRANS funded a documentary film project in Burma that may inspire some participants to become journalists in the future. In 2005, filmmaker Lindsay Merrison obtained permission from the Burmese government to teach the art of documentary filmmaking in Burma. During the three-week seminar, a team of western filmmakers trained a group of 15 young Burmese how to use cameras (which they kept), tell a story, and produce a film. The Burmese produced short documentaries on the apolitical theme, "Women in Burma." The goal of the project was to foster a nucleus of talented young Burmese filmmakers who could document events taking place within Burma. Additionally, the project coordinators hoped to foster independent thought among participants and develop close mentoring relationships with them. The documentaries were shown in Spring 2006 to an international crowd in Prague. TRANS hopes the films will also be shown in international film festivals, and even in Burma.

¶16. (C) PIN develops relationships with young Burmese people by offering internships at their offices in Prague. The Burmese interns spend a few months living in Prague, and working at PIN on democracy-related projects. The interns return to Burma with experience that may help them found grassroots civic organizations.

¶17. (SBU) The Czechs believe cultural exchanges targeted at young people are an effective way to spread western values without opposition from the regime. For example, TRANS funded a project to bring a Belarusian band, N.R.M. (a popular dissident rock band that has been banned from playing in Belarus), to Prague to play at a music festival during the summer. Czech rock bands similarly traveled to Belarus to play. The MFA has also proposed cultural exchanges as a way to work with North Korean youth; the Czechs proposed last year to bring a North Korean children's choir to Prague, but extended negotiations on the details have now been put on hold following the nuclear test.

¶18. (SBU) Another important form of support for youth is through educational support. For example, after the recent presidential election in Belarus, the Czech parliament

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authorized TRANS to spend over \$1 million in programming for Belarus. The majority of this funding was earmarked for assistance to Belarusian students, some of whom have been

expelled for their political beliefs. In 2006 to date, 150 Belarusian students have come to the Czech Republic to attend classes or to participate in internships. However, there are problems with this type of assistance:

-- (U) Awarding full scholarships to Czech colleges could cause students to come to the Czech Republic to be educated, and then never return to Belarus (causing a brain drain). The Czechs therefore offered students a stipend for six months of schooling.

-- (U) On the other hand, the Czechs were concerned that students who came even for a semester might not be able to safely return to Belarusian society.

-- (U) It was difficult to find educationally qualified candidates.

-- (U) Some of the students came for fun and freedom, not to be educated or seriously take part in internship programs.

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Comment  
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¶19. (C) Comment. The Czechs continue to experiment with creative and non-traditional approaches to building support in closed societies for democratic values and human rights. Although their projects are often small in scale, they appear to have a large impact, at least as measured by the outrage expressed by dictators like Castro and Lukashenko in response to these projects. The Czechs share the U.S. commitment to creating conditions that will permit democracy to take root in closed societies, and remain willing to explore ways to cooperate with the U.S. on future projects. End comment.  
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